Gibson E-5 (no date) 1981 HTH Wasko HTH

[P.395, A]

771 Few, if any, Wasko activities do not contain an element which we can describe as religious, supernatural, or magical. This element is most commonly revealed by specifically ritualized behavior carried on while a regular course of action is being taken by a Wasko. The following sections will deal with this ritualized behavior and the rationale for it offered by the Wasko.

CONCEPTION AND CONTRACEPTION

832 Apparently the Wasko have no specific ritual to encourage conception. They are extremely fond of children and desire as many as possible. No Wasko has ever heard of, or will admit having heard of, infanticide among the Wasko, although they have heard of the practice among other Indians. The birth of an illegitimate child, despite the attitude of whites, is greeted with as much joy as that of a legitimate child.

[847] [848]

842 789 However, it is believed that conception can be prevented by manipulation of the afterbirth. When the afterbirth is expelled it is wrapped in a piece of deer hide or cloth and buried. It is always placed right side up if a woman desires to continue bearing children. If she wishes not to have children it is buried upside down. If at a later time she wishes to become pregnant, she will turn the earth where the upside-down afterbirth was buried. Informants say that not many people do this any more, mainly because younger women go to the hospital to have their babies, but that many people know how and some may still do it.

[178]

842 754 Certain Indians are reported to be able to prevent the birth of children without the knowledge of the woman concerned. This requires the cooperation of a woman who has just had a child and who will give the magician the afterbirth. It is then buried or hidden upside down and the woman concerned will not become pregnant. The method of transferring the influence of the afterbirth from the real mother to the victim was not explained, and in fact the practice was revealed with a good deal of reluctance.

BIRTH
(2178-2288)

844 Informants report that the baby was not touched, either by the mother or her attendants, until the afterbirth was expelled. The birth and recuperation were carried out in a pit filled with warm ashes. A slow birth was blamed on the belief that the mother had slept too much or been lazy during her pregnancy.

[845] [843]

The mother was not allowed to eat salt until the baby's umbilicus dropped off, usually in two or three days. The umbilicus was dried and hung on the right side of the cradleboard to insure that the baby would be right-handed.

[263] [856]

846 The baby's hair was cut about thirty days after the birth. Until that time the mother was not permitted to eat meat or to leave her bed of ashes. However, one of my informants who had borne eight children claimed never to have spent more than two weeks in her lying-in bed. She did insist that "in the old days" women adhered to the traditional thirty-day period.

[262] [302] [178]

[P. 376, A]

881
(271)
(262)
(263)

active and not to be lazy. She drinks only warm water. In the old days anything that she gathered anyone could come along and take. She couldn't eat meat or salt but Washo don't think eggs are the same as meat."

(This last statement was in response to direct questions and does not reflect special Washo truths. In fact, all food appears to have been forbidden for four days.)

(124)
(262)

(574)
(202)

The family of the girl immediately prepares as much food as possible to feed the guests. One informant remembers in his youth that a family of a girl eligible for a dance would light a large fire part way up on Job's Peak to announce the event.

(778)

The dance itself is carried out at night. Singing and hand-clapping accompany the dancing, which may go on all night. During the dance the girl carries a wand about six or seven feet long. The wand is made of a very light wood, often elderberry, and painted red with a native pigment.

(178)

In the past, groups camped about Dresslerville staged their dances at the base of a prominent hill nearby. During the night the girl was required to run to the top of the hill and light four fires; this practice has been discontinued for many years, however, apparently as a result of white accusations that the Indians started range fires and also to avoid attracting curious whites.

(856)
(824)

About dawn one of the girl's male relatives ran forward and snatched the stick from her. He then ran with it into the hills and hid it in an upright position in some out-of-the-way place.

The elderberry wand is a device used to insure the girl's continued agility and lightness of foot. As long as the hidden stick remains unbroken the girl will remain straight and agile.

(829)

After the stick was taken away, an older female relative took a small amount of ash on a whisk of sage, and dusted the nude girl on the head, arms, and legs.

(782)

This ritual was accompanied by an informal prayer that the girl not suffer pains in her head, arms, or legs. She was told: "I am doing this early in the morning so that you will get up early in the morning and work hard." The whisk was then thrown into the crowd, along with a gift, which today is usually a bit of money. Food or beads were apparently used in the past.

(431)
(178)

(515)

After the dusting, a basketful of water was brought forward and the girl was bathed. The basket was then thrown into the crowd. This was considered a high point of the celebration. After she was bathed, a few dabs of native pigment were placed on her chest and face.

(302)

The ceremony above was described as the "real way to do it . . . the way they did it in the old days."

881
178

The Carson Valley Record Courier reports a puberty dance held in the summer of 1919 in which at least some of these activities were observed (although the reporter thought he was attending a betrothal dance). Some two-hundred Indians were in attendance. There were no fires, only lanterns and flashlights. The participants had taken up a collection and purchased watermelon, ice cream, cake, pie, bread, and meat for the feast. The food was served (to the surprise of the reporter) on a long table with plates. About midnight two girls appeared in the center of the dancing circle carrying long wands.

(574)

In 1924 Lowie witnessed a girls' dance near Minden

Involved in gift and ceremonial exchange was culturally defined in specific ways and had more of a ritual quality than familial sharing. The transfer of goods between households in setting up a marriage involved a formal sequence of gift and counter-gift that might go on for over a year. It involved a stronger demand for reciprocity than familial sharing and in some cases had the characteristics of trade. The negotiation, however, was implicit and not directly verbalized as it is in trade.

Gift and ceremonial exchange is, in economic terms an "exchange" while familial sharing and task group sharing are not. There tended to be a time lapse between the giving of a gift and a return gift. The gift was usually accepted without question of its value. Social status was a primary factor in gift and ceremonial exchange.

It was in connection with the life cycle events of birth, puberty, marriage, and death that gift and ceremonial exchange became customary and highly integrated with social ritual. Birth and puberty were also occasions for fasting and exercise of food taboos. These are two customs that should be included in any analysis of food distribution. The taboo on meat and salt occurred at these times and at every menstruation while salt was never considered good for children.

Childbirth among the Washo was a long and arduous affair involving fasting for both parents and extensive gift giving. A midwife prepared a bed with woven sagebrush bark mat over warm sand. If the child was in a poor position for delivery the midwife manipulated the child within the mother. As the delivery was being effected usually one or two women came in to help. A buckskin belt was tied around the mother above the child and the belt was worked down by pressure in rhythm with the birth movements. As the child was being born the midwife recited a short exhortation to the child: "Hurry up and come out so I can see you."

The umbilical cord was cut by the midwife about four inches from the child's abdomen and then tied with string or sinew one inch from the child's abdomen. Following this was the washing of the baby, the careful burial of the afterbirth, and intricate care of the mother. The mother was given the sap of the sugarpine dissolved in warm water and massaged with a greasy salve. The mother abstained from eating meat, fat, or salt for a period of a month after the child was born. She could not eat anything but a thin pine-nut soup, and she could not be washed until the umbilical cord fell from the child, a period of about four days. At the end of her period in bed, usually nine or ten days, the mother bathed, painted herself, and gave away her old clothes.

The baby was wrapped in furs and placed on a sagebrush bark mat in a temporary cradle. A new temporary cradle was used after each bath.

Informants indicate that in historic times a scoop-shaped basketry tray (modal) was used instead of the old style temporary cradle.

The father bathed and gave a present to another man after the birth of the child. The father also shared his wife's fast from meat, fats, and salt during her confinement. At the end of the observances the father gave away his old clothes, bathed, painted himself red, went hunting, and gave away his first kill.

At the end of the mother's month of meat taboo a feast (ngawngang ?eluhaya?) was held. Gifts of food, baskets, or other goods were made. It was particularly important for grandparents to be present, the food being passed to them first. At this feast the mother ate meat again and a short ritual was performed for the baby.

The normative pattern for the girl's puberty ceremony involved two dances, four feasts, extensive gift giving, and a complex schedule of fasts and observances for the girl. As with birth practices and menstruation (gumisasum) the girl abstained from meat, fat, or salt. At puberty this taboo lasted two months. On the occasion of her first and second menstruation the girl would fast from all food for a four day period. These four day periods would culminate in four fires being built up the side of a hill, a large feast, an all night dance (te?we?we?) and a washing ceremony for the girl at dawn. After her washing ceremony, the girl would be given a slight taste of several foods along with bits of sagebrush. This would be chewed and expectorated. Then she would have a full breakfast. About twenty days after each of her first two menstruations, small feasts were held for close relatives of the girl.

During the ceremonial period the girl worked hard for her mother and often helped neighboring women. During the feast the father or uncle "talked" for the girl's health, announced the customs of the ceremony, and told about all the fine food that had been brought for the feast. "A giving away of presents (hiyemaiyeki) takes place in the girl's honor" (Lowie 1939, 306). If the household was poor, or if a recent death had occurred in the kinship group, the feasts and dances were not held. In this case the girl would merely fast and have the essential washing ceremony.

A ceremony for boys at puberty was sometimes carried out. Prior to this ceremony any game that the boy killed was given to others outside his family. When he passed this ceremony he could then eat his own kill and share it with his family.

The ceremony was initiated by a boy's shooting of a large male deer or antelope. After the animal had been skinned and butchered, the tips of the

band by sending a messenger around the country carrying a knotted cord (ba?ló·go). The knots represented the number of days remaining until the persons who wished to take part in the fight were to gather at the place of assembly, and the messenger untied one knot every day so as to keep track of the time that remained.

After the warriors had assembled, they engaged in a war dance which lasted four or eight nights. During this period, they manufactured bows and arrows. The arrows were smeared with rattlesnake poison obtained by letting a rattlesnake strike a piece of deer meat. The war dance was a kind of test and training for warfare. A man demonstrated by vigorous dancing that he was strong and fit to go to war; and the dance itself consisted of sudden, jerking movements as if one were dodging arrows. The war dance resembled the pine-nut dance in that features of both dances imitated the coming activities: in the war dance, men danced with bows and arrows and acted as if they were at war; in the pine-nut dance, people carried their implements for gathering and cooking pine nuts. Several taboos were observed during the period of the war dance: (1) men and women were forbidden sexual intercourse; (2) warriors could not eat meat and salt; (3) pregnant women could not throw their shadows on men engaged in dancing and they could not touch the bows and arrows.

Shamans who accompanied the war party served two functions: they called on their supernatural power to keep the enemy and his dogs asleep during the assault; and since they were specialists in herbal medicine, they treated the wounded. The shamans also selected the night for the attack. While the Washo were surrounding the enemy camp, the shamans became very intent on their praying so that none of the enemy should awake. The Washo then entered the camp of the enemy, set fire to their huts, and killed them with clubs and arrows as they emerged. Everyone was killed, even small babies.

When the Washo returned, they had a dance which lasted two or four nights. Lowie reports that men and women danced over the capture of the scalp of the enemy regarded as the best fighter. The scalp was tied to the top of an eight-foot, peeled, willow pole, which everyone except young girls seized and shook. The people finally burned the hair of the scalp and then went home (Lowie, 1939, pp. 329-330). My informants omitted mention of the scalp, but said that an important feature of the dance after the fighting was a ritual bath. This was necessary before the warriors could eat or have intercourse with their wives. The Washo apparently were militarily superior to the Miwok and the Maidu on the west, but they found the more numerous Paiute on their eastern border more formidable opponents. The fact that the Paiute obtained horses earlier than the Washo would also have given the Paiute some superiority in warfare.

SUMMARY

Aboriginal Washo culture may be thought of as a blend of Californian and Great Basin cultural traits Heizer and Elsasser (1953, p. 4) note the following ties with California:

> . . . the conical dwelling made by piling up bark slabs; semi-subterranean assembly house; "community" or bedrock mortar; emphasis on coiled

shamans; however, pipe, tobacco and cocoon rattle are used by all shamans. Rupert uses Indian tobacco, a handkerchief, a bone, a bone whistle, a cocoon rattle, a little bag and an eagle feather. He rolls the tobacco into cigarettes, but in pre-white times, the shaman used a tubular stone pipe. The eagle feather represents Rupert's eagle wegelέyu and the bone his Hindu wegelέyu. Curing takes place indoors after sunset and usually lasts four nights, although the ceremony can be shortened to two nights. 756 [171] [755]

Rupert begins by washing the patient's face and arms with cold water. Everyone attending the ceremony must wash his face. The patient lies down with his feet to the east. Rupert then smokes some white man's tobacco because of the Hindu. He ties the handkerchief around his head with the bone inside. He prays, talks, smokes Indian tobacco, blows smoke on the patient and walks about. He blows his whistle and passes a bag over the patient. Rupert claims that he can catch the disease in his whistle, and that when he does so, the whistle doesn't make much noise. Rupert makes an offering of pinenut meal by scattering it over the patient and toward the door. He sings his wegelέyu songs, accompanying himself with the rattle. Alternately he smokes, sings and prays, calling upon the Hindu, water, eagle and little boy to help. If Paiutes are present, they sometimes sing with the shaman, but, says Rupert, the Washo are a little afraid and do not sing. The first three nights the ceremony lasts until about midnight; then refreshments are served. During the curing the shaman and the patient abstain from meat and salt. On the fourth night the ceremony lasts all night and everyone must stay awake; after the ceremony all spectators must take a bath. 955 756 [262] [263] [515]

At some point in the ceremony the shaman has a vision and can foretell whether or not the cure will be successful. According to Rupert, if the cure is to be successful, the eagle will join him in singing and he will see clear water and green vegetation. If the eagle fails to join the singing and Rupert sees a dry and quiet scene, the patient will not recover. If the shaman sees water that is not clear, the patient will recover only partially. Rupert does not like to predict the outcome of the cure because he says that the eagle sometimes fools him and makes him lie to the patient's relatives.

Some variation in the curing ceremonies seems to depend on the cause of the disease. Stewart, Lowie and our informants mention the sucking out of the disease object as a part of the curing ceremony. The shaman displays the object and then disposes of it by throwing it away, throwing it in a fire, or by swallowing it. This occurred either when a person became sick from mistreating Indian food or was a victim of sorcery. In the latter case the shaman might not himself be able to cure the patient, but would see the face of the sorcerer in a vision. Then the patient's relatives could kill the sorcerer or force him to cure the patient; either procedure would result in his recovery. [783]

762
cure his wife. When she died, he broke the taboo against eating salt and died. [263]
The fourth successful case did involve an attempt at social control. A father [784]
and daughter did not get along because the daughter was supporting the father. [626]
The daughter complained and the father threatened suicide. He repeated the
threat a day later and the daughter told him to do whatever he wanted. The
father took his gun and shot himself below the chin. This method of suicide
is not typical and was clearly inappropriate, because it gave the daughter no
chance to change her behavior.

Hank Pete says that he has heard many threats of suicide and that peo- 762
ple do this, "to scare money from old parents." Pete also says that men at- 626
tempt suicide more often than women, who just leave home when interpersonal 562
difficulties arise. The destruction of the self is an ultimate threat, and the
fact that men are more likely to invoke it than women indicates a lack of male
authority in Washo culture. This same characteristic of the male role was
revealed in an analysis of role behavior by kinsmen among the modern Washo.
"... Men tend to see their relationships regarding who dominates them as
clearly structured, but are much less clear as to whom they dominate; women
see their relationship with subordinate relatives to be structured almost as
clearly as their relationships with dominant ones. This may be an indication [157]
that Washo males tend to lack self-confidence...." (Freed, 1960, 370). We
believe that the lack of male self-confidence is a modern phenomenon and can- [154]
not be projected into the past. The reason probably is that males have a more
difficult time adjusting to modern conditions than women. This has been noted
in other American Indian hunting-gathering tribes (Hallowell, 1942, 48;
Caudill, 1949, 425). In the case of the Washo, the main difficulties of the men
may be due to seasonal unemployment and lack of economic opportunities. Of
the five cases of violence against the self involving attempts at social control,
three were by men; of these three, two were motivated by complaints by wom-
en that a male relative was making no economic contribution.

We suspect that among the modern Washo the use of alcoholic beverages 762
has partially replaced the threat of suicide in interpersonal relations. Bertha 273
Holbrook commented, "Nobody commits suicide today -- instead they begin 177
drinking." Alcohol probably has many functions in modern Washo culture; its 626
role as a means to control the behavior of relatives is possibly a minor one.
If the control of relatives is one of the functions of alcohol, its effectiveness
is based on different culture patterns than is the effectiveness of suicide. Sui-
cide controls through the fear of ghosts; drinking may control through fear of
the direct aggression of the drunken person, especially because the Washo be-
come hostile and aggressive when they are drinking. It is possible that a per-
son may die from overindulgence in alcohol or may be killed in a drunken
brawl and thus become a ghost, but this is infrequent and therefore a minor
consideration.

844
[272] [263] After the child was born, great care was taken to prevent the mother from getting cold. She was given a drink of warm water with "sugar" (šigimba) from the sugar pine. She was then submitted to further pressure by the midwife in order to insure the complete removal of the afterbirth. Some say that she sat up with knees under her chin the first night after the infant was born to effect the final draining.

846
[262] [515] The woman could not eat anything except pinenut soup and was not washed until the umbilical cord (ʔiʔip) fell from the child, about four days later. The woman remained in bed about nine or 10 days and had an older woman as an attendant during this period. There were often several women in attendance, but the person designated as midwife handled the baby and tied the cord.

[834] For a month (for a young mother, two months) after the child was born the mother abstained from eating meat, fat, or salt. "A woman who had given birth to four children no longer observed this taboo (Jack)" (Lowie, 1939, 305). The parents abstained from sexual intercourse for up to six to 12 months after a birth. At the end of her confinement the mother bathed, painted herself, and gave away her old clothes.

844
[412] [752] [824] The umbilical cord was cut off about 4 in. from the child's abdomen with a stone knife or a sharp cane blade. It was then tied with a string or sinew an inch from the abdomen. After this the baby was washed and the cord bound to the abdomen with a strip of deerskin. Two medicinal roots were applied to the cord. A greasy salve (dõ·ša?) was put on next to the abdomen and cottonwood tree bark (tšša? ʔi·š) was placed on top of the cord before it was bound down. The cord and medicines were kept moist with water.

854
[853] [757] [824] Some say that the baby was not nursed by the mother for two days, but others seem to think there was no delay or that it was given warm water to suck from the end of a rabbit's foot. A baby powder was made from the ashes of the bark of the cottonwood tree. The baby was wrapped in woodchuck or rabbit skins. A grass or bark pad was put under the infant and changed when necessary.

844
[842] [754] After the child had been washed the afterbirth was disposed of. The piece of cord that had been cut off was coiled clockwise, placed back in the amniotic sack on top of the placenta, and the whole carefully wrapped in grass or bark and buried in warm ashes with the cord up. This was done in order that the mother would have more children. Should she not want any more children, the placenta was turned over and buried so the cord was on the bottom and was thus counter-clockwise. The midwife took care that no one watched where she buried the placenta for, if it were destroyed, illness would come to the mother.

2 From Indian Balsam Leptotaenia dissecta Nutt., according to Juanita Schubert and Personal Communication.

881

Prior to the girl's first menstruation she is instructed on her proper behavior. She is taken to many ceremonies for other girls and she knows what she has to do. The rules and ritual observances are as follows:

[785] 1. She must fast for four days. She may drink only warm water with
[272] "sugar" from the sugar pine in R. Some say this sugar has a mild laxative
[263] effect. The actual period of extreme fasting is around three and one-half days.

[262] 2. She must fast from all meat, fish, fats and salt until four days after her next menstrual period starts. The meat taboo is reported to have gone on for two or even three months.

3. She must run daily for the next four days and she must work for others by carrying firewood or helping her mother.

4. She must sleep only briefly each night, get up early in the morning, and never lie down during the day.

5. During the four days of fast she must remain standing so that the blood will run down. She will have a staff for this purpose.

[778] 6. If she lets the staff fall she will die soon. If the staff breaks she
[761] will break her leg or her back.

[752] 7. She is unclean and must therefore avoid hunters, fishers, men go-
[783] ing to gather rabbits, and all of their equipment. She must also avoid gamblers and the sick.

[302] 8. She must not comb her own hair or scratch herself with her fingers for a month. If she does, her hair will soon turn grey.

9. At the end of the four days there will be a ceremony in which she will dance, be painted with red ocher, be bathed, have a ritual repast, and then a feast for breaking fast.

881 10. There will be four feasts in her honor -- the first on the fourth day
574 after the beginning of her menstruation. The second feast is about 15 days
later. The third is on the fourth day after the beginning of her second men-
[178] struation. The fourth feast is about 15 days later. Today, with the addition of breakfasts after the dancing connected with the first and third feasts, there are six feasts.

[302] 11. She will have her hair trimmed at the second and fourth feasts (third and sixth today).